



April 14th, 2015

TO: The Honorable Senator Phil Pavlov

RE: Senate Bill 103 (Pavlov) – Support if Amended

StudentsFirst Michigan would like to inform you of our intent to support –if amended –Senate Bill 103, authored by Senator Pavlov and introduced on February 12, 2015. The mission of StudentsFirst is to build a national movement to defend the interests of children in public education and pursue transformative reform, so that America has the best education system in the world. StudentsFirst has over one million members nationwide.

Senate Bill 103 seeks to amend existing statute to ensure the adoption and implementation of a rigorous, multiple measure teacher and administrator evaluation system in all school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies across the state of Michigan. StudentsFirst has long stood with students and parents in demanding that all students have the opportunity to learn from a highly effective teacher, in a school led by a highly-effective administrator, at every grade level and in every subject. Senate Bill 103 is a good first step in realizing this vision, but significant improvements could be made to the bill.

First, the bill specifies that all school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies must adopt an observation tool to be used to measure teacher performance during classroom observations. While StudentsFirst supports the use of observation tools that have demonstrated reliability and validity, we are concerned that without clear guidance or approved tools, local districts will have a hard time developing or identifying high-quality observation protocols that truly capture the critical dimensions of teacher practice that research has demonstrated are related to student learning.

Senate Bill 103 –under Section 1249(6) –already requires that the Department of Technology, Management, and Budget maintain a list of observation tools, but does not require that these tools meet any pre-approved criteria or that districts adopt a tool from the list. We recommend amending Section 1249(6), to require that tools placed on the list have demonstrated evidence of efficacy when used in other contexts, and amending Section 1249(2)d to require that all districts and public school academies adopt an evaluation tool from the list. These amendments would help to ensure that local districts and public school academies adopt evidence-based tools as part of their teacher evaluation systems.

Second, with respect to evaluator training, Section 1249(4)F and Section 1249B(3)F requires all school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies to post on their website a plan for providing teacher and administrator evaluators, respectively, with training. StudentsFirst believes that in order for evaluations to be conducted in a manner that is fair, valid, and reliable, all evaluators MUST receive training on conducting observations using the selected evaluation tool. Best practice from other states and districts suggests that this training should include, at a minimum, an initial training on the tool as well as ongoing trainings to ensure continued calibration of observer ratings. While StudentsFirst is agnostic to the entity that provides the training, we believe that teacher and administrator observations cannot serve as a rigorous measure of educator performance unless all evaluators are provided with opportunities to learn to use the tool, including some form of certification to ensure they are equipped to conduct reliable and valid observations. Without appropriate training teachers and administrators will continue to lack confidence in the value of the information produced

from classroom observations which will undermine the importance of teacher evaluations as a mechanism to improve teacher performance and ensure all students have access to world-class instruction.

Also contained within Section 1531J of Senate Bill 103 are provisions relating to teacher certification. Specifically, this section requires that beginning July 1, 2018 the Superintendent of Public Instruction not issue an initial professional teaching certificate to an individual unless they have three years of classroom teaching experience, meet certain criteria for demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom, and have completed at least six semester hours or the equivalent in a planned program at an approved teacher preparation institution in the grade level and subject area they teach. StudentsFirst supports linking professional teacher certification to demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom. However, we do not believe that additional coursework is necessarily important to ensure teacher effectiveness and may in fact serve as a barrier for alternatively certified teachers to receiving an initial professional teaching certificate. In fact, there is a substantial research base to suggest that with a few exceptions, additional coursework at the graduate level for teachers makes very little difference in terms of improved performance. For these reasons, we recommend amending this section to eliminate the required six semester credit hours. This will ensure that attainment of an initial professional teaching certificate is directly linked to a teacher's classroom performance while eliminating unnecessary barriers for those who enter the profession from alternative pathways.

Finally, Senate Bill 103 fails to allocate critical financial resources to districts to support the development and implementation of meaningful, multiple measure educator evaluation systems. Effective implementation of educator evaluation systems requires a substantial investment of pecuniary and non-pecuniary resources by school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies. As such, StudentsFirst believes that all districts and public school academies who take on the important work of developing and adopting educator evaluation systems in compliance with the law should be provided the funds required to cover the costs of developing evaluation tools and materials and providing necessary trainings for evaluators. To address this issue, StudentsFirst recommends that the funds previously allocated to support the adoption and implementation of educator evaluations systems be appropriated for that use and distributed to all districts and public academies.

On behalf of our members, we stand ready to help advance this important legislation if the critical provisions outlined above can be amended to truly ensure the adoption of meaningful, standards-based, multiple-measure teacher and administrator evaluation systems in all school districts and academies across the state of Michigan.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Huddleston
State Director, StudentsFirst Michigan